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S E C R E T ABU DHABI 03243

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INFO: RSO P/M POL ICE ECON DAO DCM

DISSEMINATION: AMB
CHARGE: PROG

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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ABU DHABI 003243

SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ARPI, S/CT, DS/ITA, DS/IP/NEA,
INR/NESA
NSC FOR JUAN ZARATE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/24/2015
TAGS: [PTER](#) [PINS](#) [ASEC](#) [EPET](#) [MCAP](#) [TC](#)
SUBJECT: UAE COUNTERTERRORISM EFFORTS: GOOD HARDWARE, BUT
POOR COORDINATION

REF: A. 2005 ABU DHABI 0301
[B](#). IIR 6 931 0113 05
[C](#). 2005 ABU DHABI 1683

Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: The UAE, keenly aware that the threat of extremist violence on its soil is real, is implementing numerous measures in hopes of preventing terrorist attacks. In the past year, the UAEG has prioritized homeland security within its national security strategy. However, the UAE lacks a coordinated, strategic approach to homeland security, relying instead on acquisition of technology. Although the UAE established the interagency and inter-emirate National Counter Terrorism Committee last year, there continues to be relatively little coordination within and between the emirates on counterterrorism strategies. No one organization has the clear lead on defining counterterrorism policies and priorities. While the Emirate of Dubai's CT efforts are robust, they deal almost exclusively with activities inside Dubai.

[1](#)2. (S) Summary continued: The UAEG performs tactical, vice strategic, operational planning and often does not prioritize its national security projects. The UAE lacks the manpower to fully enforce its national security plan -- such as the exclusion zone off the UAE coast and major offshore oil facilities. Conversations between Embassy officials, Western oil executives, security consultants, and UAEG officials indicate that UAE efforts primarily entail hiring multiple consultants, forming multiple committees, and procuring

multiple pieces of equipment. End Summary.

Everyone's In the CT Game, But Who Is In Charge?

13. (C) Although the UAE Ministry of Interior has overall authority over border security and critical infrastructure efforts, the military and State Security Directorate (SSD) also play a significant role in the UAE's counterterror efforts. Often times the efforts of the different organizations are not coordinated. There is relatively little coordination between Abu Dhabi and Dubai on counterterrorism strategies. In Dubai, the Dubai State Security Organization (SSO) acts nearly autonomously on its cases. The Dubai Police Department's advanced crisis management system, while state-of-the-art, is not interoperable with federal communication systems. In an effort to better coordinate, the UAE has established at least two inter-ministerial and inter-emirate committees -- one dealing broadly with counterterrorism and one specifically dealing with critical infrastructure protection -- but even these committees are subject to inter-agency disputes about lead authority and control. The first committee, the Counter Terrorism Committee, is designed to set and coordinate UAE counterterrorism policy, but the committee (headed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) focuses primarily on implementing the UAE's international counterterrorism commitments under the United Nations.

14. (S) In a series of meetings with UAE military and security officials during the summer/autumn of 2004, senior U.S. officials highlighted potential threats to the UAE critical infrastructure and encouraged the UAE to heighten security. In direct response to these meetings, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed (MbZ) formed an inter-ministerial committee to assess critical infrastructure vulnerability and recommend security enhancements. The Ministry of Interior (MoI) is the lead agency, with participation by the UAE Armed Forces (through the Directorate of Military Intelligence and Security), State Security Directorate, and the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC). Despite good intentions, this committee has been stymied by long lags between meetings, poor cooperation among members, and a lack of clear direction. Organizations represented on the committee often move forward on their own initiatives, without coordinating with the other bodies (for example, at one point, the military and MoI had both planned to build separate national command centers on the same plot of land).

15. (C) The UAE often gets tied down in a "study it to death" philosophy. Over the past four years, multiple elements of the UAEG have entered into numerous contracts, MOUs, and informal agreements with major international defense contractors to conduct threat and vulnerability assessments and develop proposals for high-grade border security and critical infrastructure protection. General Headquarters (the UAE's military headquarters), Directorate of Military Intelligence and Security, MoI, the Supreme Petroleum Council, and the Abu Dhabi and Dubai police departments have all separately contracted out projects with international defense and security companies to conduct assessments and implement border security and critical infrastructure programs. These programs are not coordinated and often overlap.

Border Security - It's All About Technology

16. (S) Since 9/11, the UAE has transformed the military and internal security agencies to focus more concretely on border security with an eye toward blocking extremists' entry into the country. In a February meeting with Homeland Security Advisor Fran Townsend, MbZ described the UAE's border control challenges and admitted that the UAE's land and sea borders were still porous and vulnerable (ref A). From border security measures such as iris scanners at 17 ports of entry, a 525 mile long "security wall" along the border with Oman and Saudi Arabia, and listening and observation posts

equipped with video, infrared and sound technology along the land borders, the UAEG is spending significant amounts of money on border security initiatives. The UAE's push for domestic development of an armed unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) is also an effort to further enhance its border security (ref B). The problem with the UAEG's hardware profile, however, is that the government often procures the equipment before designing an operational plan fully. This, coupled with the UAEG tendency to buy equipment piecemeal, from different international companies, often leads to non-interoperable systems.

¶17. (S) The UAEG often launches a project with an international partner and then expands the project itself, without further contracts. For example, the government contracted Raytheon to assist with the border security project along a discreet length of the Saudi Arabia-UAE border, and then planned to complete the border security fence along the Omani-UAE border independently. According to Lunday, "They wanted to take what we had done and just carbon-copy it along the rest of the border. They didn't understand that different terrain has different needs."

¶18. (S) Although most of the illegal aliens who enter the UAE via its porous land and sea borders are seeking to enter the UAE for economic purposes, the UAEG is aware that its borders could be exploited by terrorists and terrorist facilitators. The UAE has continued to reshape its Land Forces by transferring 5,000 soldiers to the Frontier Corps responsible for border security, but these units have remained part of the UAE Armed Forces -- rather than being transferred to the Ministry of Interior as previously announced. Minister of Interior Sheikh Saif bin Zayed Al Nahyan (a member of the Abu Dhabi ruling family) resisted the transfer of the Frontier Corps to the MoI, preferring instead to leave the border security function to the UAE Armed Forces. The Frontier Corps is responsible for investigating any illegal border crossings, and local newspapers frequently report the arrest of "infiltrators" by the Frontier Corps. The coastline of the UAE is patrolled by the UAE Coast Guard, which plans to use as many as 200 small patrol craft in the future to conduct a picket line interdiction operation 12 miles outside the coast and around the exclusion zones to investigate any unregistered dhows or ships entering the patrol zone. Despite these patrol craft, the UAE sea border is often used by illegal aliens who enter the country through the Gulf of Oman and attempt to walk across to the emirates of Sharjah or Ajman.

Critical Infrastructure

¶19. (C) Although the UAE has taken steps to try to limit the vulnerability of its critical infrastructure, the consensus of oil industry executives and even UAEG officials is that UAE facilities are still at risk. The Ministry of Interior, which is responsible for security at power, water, and onshore oil facilities, formed a unit to examine critical infrastructure protection. This small team (which received training from the U.S. Department of Homeland Security) has focused primarily on designing security features for new government buildings in Abu Dhabi. Much of the UAEG's existing infrastructure remains lightly guarded and lacks significant resources to protect against a concerted attack.

¶10. (S) The key onshore infrastructure includes oil fields and facilities, power plants, and water desalination plants. UAEG officials have reiterated to USG interlocutors that they feel the power and desalination plants are the most vulnerable to attack, since only a few sites provide all water and electricity usage in the Emirates. Since 2001, the UAE has significantly increased security procedures at oil, power, and water facilities -- requiring badges and background checks for all visitors and personnel. BP Middle East and Pakistan President Michael Daly (protect) pointed out earlier this year that the UAEG does not take a strategic approach to critical infrastructure protection, attempting to cover every contingency rather than focusing on vulnerable

chokepoints (ref C). For example, ADNOC's onshore security plans thus far consist of grandiose schemes such as fencing off all of the vast oil fields and pipelines and installing closed circuit TV along every mile of buried pipeline. According to the President of ExxonMobil al-Khaleej, Frank Kemnetz (protect), ADNOC officials recognize that this plan will not in fact really decrease the vulnerability of critical oil and gas facilities, but since plans have been announced to build fences and install video monitoring everywhere, it would be "embarrassing" to completely change strategies. Kemnetz assessed that ADNOC will fence certain parts of the pipelines (even though an attack on one would not impact the UAE's ability to produce or export oil), and will develop more robust plans to better protect other chokepoints, such as export terminals.

¶11. (S) Industry executives have noted many times that the offshore infrastructure is more vulnerable to an attack than the onshore, since there are large numbers of offshore facilities that need protection. The major offshore sites are patrolled by the UAE Coast Guard and Armed Forces who enforce an exclusion zone and prohibit unauthorized boats to get near offshore facilities. However, the UAE lacks the manpower resources to patrol their vast offshore sites and enforce these zones.

¶12. (S) The UAE also lacks a deep understanding of the capabilities and tactics of potential attackers. In developing an offshore oil field protection scheme, Raytheon requested a detailed map of the Das Island oil facilities (the major offshore integrated refinery and holding tanks). The UAEG refused, saying it was highly classified. Raytheon simply pulled a commercial satellite image of the facility - and the senior UAEG officials were shocked that such information was publicly, and easily, available. Although many UAE sites, such as Das Island, are large-scale, integrated complexes, and would be difficult for terrorists to take completely off-line using conventional weapons, an attack on a single liquid natural gas (LNG) plant or oil refinery would likely damage world confidence, thus causing energy prices to spike.

Hotel and Tourist Destinations - Who's Watching?

¶13. (C) In Abu Dhabi, the security presence at major hotels is more likely effective at countering crime vice deterring or preventing acts of terrorism. Hotel security and police officials are not yet completely focused on the need for a different strategy. Hotel security officials monitor closed circuit video television (CCVT) systems, and the Abu Dhabi Police Department's Criminal Investigative Division (CID) reports that plain-clothed officers patrol hotel lobbies and clubs at night. But the discreet nature of security measures in both Abu Dhabi and Dubai does not serve as a significant, visible counterterror deterrent. Even after this week's attacks in Sharm Al Sheikh, hotel officials continue to prefer to rely on surveillance technology, rather than implement more overt security measures -- such as metal detectors and bollards at the front entrances -- out of concern of offending their guests.

¶14. (C) In Dubai, where authorities are aware that even one attack could wreak havoc on their ambitious future plans and strong desire to maintain the city's reputation as a world-class terrorism and business hub, the "anything goes" atmosphere is in some ways deceptive. The State Security Organization (SSO) endeavors to keep close tabs on third country nationals whose sympathies are known to lie with extremist groups. Still, Dubai is replete with soft targets, and there exists among residents and security personnel a worrisome complacency.

Internal Defense, Crisis Management - In Case of the Worst

¶15. (S) In meetings this year with senior U.S. officials, MbZ's growing concern about internal security has become apparent. Expressing his concerns that the Saudi Government might one day collapse and be taken over by extremists, MbZ

worries that the UAE may one day need to defend itself against an influx of extremists. MbZ recently told Ambassador and Washington visitors that he wants the 250 UAE Special Forces soldiers fighting with Coalition Forces in Afghanistan to become more "battle-hardened" in the event of an "internal security" crisis. In a similar vein, the UAE military is seeking multi million dollar training programs from U.S. companies like Blackwater USA for its Special Forces units. Although UAE leaders are making efforts to prepare for contingencies, Raytheon executive Bob Lunday told Econoff, "the UAE military is the only element of the UAE that is even remotely able to respond to a sustained attack or large incident, but their capabilities are frightening (poor) and I fear the response will be disastrous."

¶16. (S) Lack of a centralized command and control system and non-interoperable UAE communication systems further impede the UAE's ability to respond effectively to a crisis. Currently, the communications systems used by the police and the Ministry of Interior cannot interface with military communications, making joint response nearly impossible. Local industry executives assess that Dubai's crisis management system is effective, but it needs to expand to the national level. The UAEG is aware of the coordination problem, and intends to establish a National Crisis Management Center and an Emergency Response Center to coordinate nationwide military, police, and emergency service responses. The UAE Ministry of Presidential Affairs contracted a feasibility study with Raytheon Corp. to design a strategy for developing and operating the centers, and the study is due to be completed in August. However, the lead for the project is unclear, having rotated between the Ministry for Presidential Affairs and the Ministry of Interior. The UAE military has halted its plans to build a separate National Military Command Center, pending instructions from the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and Interior.

Comment

¶17. (S) Although UAE ruling family members are committed to enhancing the UAE's counterterrorism profile, the working-level coordination and communication remains weak. MbZ, as President Khalifa's National Security Advisor, and his brothers Interior Minister Saif and SSD Director Hazza, have a significant task ahead of them to prioritize the most important national security vulnerabilities and take concrete steps to address them. End Comment.
SISON